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AUTHOR Margon, Arthur
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ABSTRACT

Chicago's American Indians generally migrated in response to an urban dominant society, Bureau of Indian Affairs training programs, or termination of the Menomenee Reservation. A comparison of black with Native American status in Chicago indicates a vast economic differential resulting from the Indian's lack of political clout, longevity, and employable skills in an economy now far more rigid than that faced by urban migrating blacks of earlier decades. Apparent similarities between Indian urban migrants and those of earlier minorities include propensity for a mobile existence and lack of socio-cultural cohesion (e.g., the Italians). Major differences between urban Indians and other earlier urban minorities stem from the economic liability of mobile living today and the long established heritage of a non-western culture at odds with life in the modern urban sector. It is the combination of cultural heritage, skills unsuited for the national economy, and urbanization at the bottom of the socio-economic scale that perpetrates Indian disadvantagement. Yet, the Mohawks of Brooklyn, New York have combined traditional values with much needed urban skills to become high-altitude construction workers, known for the quality and courage of their work. Perhaps, the most positive potential for Indian urbanization may come in the guise of Indian leadership intent upon eradicating the American belief that land is a civil liberty rather than a social resource. (JC)

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THE INDIAN IN CHICAGO: SOME COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON GROUP ADJUSTMENT

Arthur Margon
Brooklyn College, CUNY

In the early nineteen fifties, articles appeared in Chicago newspapers heralding the arrival of a new wave of immigrants. In 1952 more than 500 American Indians had been brought to the city from reservations "where living conditions and employment opportunity" were rare. In a statement typical of the period, both for its naive optimism and its tongue-in-cheek racism, the midwest field office director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs told the Tribune that the Indians were "finding Chicago good hunting grounds: and were "taking to big city life in a heap big way. . ." A year later the Sun Times headlined "Indians Discover Chicago a Happy Hunting Ground," and in the Spring of 1953 the Daily News noted that "of some 600 American Indians who settled in Chicago since February, 1952, only 30% have gone back to the reservations."[2]

Indeed, throughout the nineteen fifties, the Bureau of Indian Affairs reported intermittantly on the success of its new program of bringing Native Americans to the city to be trained for jobs. As late as 1959 the public read statements such as "The Indian's problems here are not too much different from those of any country boy coming to the city" from the head of the local BIA office.[3] But by 1963 the Bureau, the reporters, and the public were somewhat more sophisticated. In a series on the Indian run that January, one newspaper concluded that the Indian problem was a mass of red tape, and by the end of the sixties counselors at the American Indian Center informed the public that "Each tribe has its individual problems because a way of living defined as 'western' has been imposed on it. Those aren't," the counselor concluded, "racial problems."[4]

By this time, the city was well aware of its Native American population. Soon

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there were sit-ins at the local BIA office demanding the hiring of more Natives by the Bureau, and the city's "Little Alcatraz" movement began in the Spring of 1970 when an evicted Menomenee activist left her apartment and within a month a group of Native Americans were camping out in Chicago demanding better housing.[5] Although some Indians organized a counter offensive and charged that the encampments, the "American Indian Village," and their leader, Mike Chosa, were "frauds,"[6] these activities and charges reflected greater awareness in two camps: both within the Indian community and among the population as a whole.

By now, the early cracks about Chicago being a "Happy Hunting Ground," and Indians taking to it in "a heap big way," strike a disonant chord. This is partially because we have all become much more sensitive to the racism implicit in such "humor." It is partially because public officials are no longer expected to make fun of the city's minority groups. These changes reflect a shift in national attitudes toward racism, at least to public racism. But the jokes of the fifties are also dated because they assume that Indians and the wide open spaces are an obvious pair. This was only barely true during the McCarthy era, and now it is no longer so. Native Americans have, for the last decade, comprised an "urban" population group.[7] Since 1960, more than half of the country's Native American population has lived in urban areas. Throughout the nation, and particularly in Chicago, the massive immigration of Indians since the mid-1950's has created a confused situation. In general, Chicago's Indians came to town in one of three ways: either they willingly responded to the blandishments of an urban society, or they were enticed into town through one of the BIA training programs, or they came via the training program route, but only because of the termination of the Menomenee Reservation in Wisconsin. A quick look at the Narive experience in Chicago points out the near impossibility of generalizing.

While it may be politically useful to depict Uncle Sam as having pushed the Native American into town, it may also be inaccurate. Undeniably, Indian migration to the city followed the termination measures of the early 1950's; it is on this

basis that students make the connection between federal policy and migration.[8] Yet a look north of the border calls this interpretation into question. Canadian natives, too, have been flocking to the cities since the Second World War. But neither the provincial nor the federal governments in Canada have advocated the kind of termination policy which came out of Washington during the McCarthy era.[9] Obviously, Canada is not the United States, and Canadian natives are not always the same as United States Native Americans. But, did American Indians actually move to town because of termination and relocation, or did those policies merely accompany an historical process with deeper causes. The Canadian example does not does not necessarily disprove the assertion that termination and relocation caused urbanization; it does, however, point up the problem inherent in trying to cope with an emotionally charged social issue from within the confines of a national perspective.

Chicago's Native American population is now estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000 people.[10] It is one of the largest urban Indian enclaves in the country. Viewed from within, this is a major and recent migration. A large proportion of Chicago's Native American population has come to the city since 1965; between seven and ten thousand people have arrived since 1960.[11] But, despite its size relative to the Native American movement, the Indian community of Chicago comprises less than ½ of the 1% of the city's population. The Chicago metropolitan area contains over 6,000,000 people; the Native Americans are therefore a miniscule part of the city's population.[12]

A quick look at Chicago's black community will reinforce this view. The total black population of Chicago in 1970 was over 1,000,000, or slightly more than 31% of the city's people. Most have been in Chicago since 1950: the major periods of black in-migration corresponded to the two world wars, when the national security dictated a loosening of restrictive hiring practices in the great industrial areas of Cook County.[13] So, in addition to being much larger than the Native American Community, the black enclaves of Chicago are also one to three generations older.

This time lag is important; by arriving in the city in the 1960's, the Native American, unlike previous immigrants, entered a well-articulated, highly formalized urban society.

Despite Newsweek's continuing prophecies of impending urban doom, the city of the 1960's and 1970's is not the heaving, chaotic, mass of the 1880's and 1890's. It is more organized, and more controlled. The possibilities for slipping quietly into an urban niche have been greatly reduced since first the European immigrants and then, after the World War, the blacks, arrived en masse in the city. The economy is more rigid. Unskilled jobs, which formerly were abundant and often were not dead ends, are now scarce; where they exist, they characteristically lead nowhere. This changed economic situation is the first important difference between Chicago as it appears to the Native Americans and the face it turned toward earlier in-migrants. Caucasian and Black immigrants arrived in town under great handicaps, but they came at a time when the urban economy was capable of absorbing them into its lower echelons. For good or ill, this has not been the experience of the Native American.[14]

Another problem faced by the Native Americans, and traceable to both their small numbers and their recent arrival, is their exclusion from the patronage system in Chicago. Other minorities and impoverished population groups have used politics in Chicago as a foothold in the local economy. The enormous black population has become a mainstay of the organization, and many blacks reap patronage rewards for political participation.[15] But, because there are so few Native Americans in the city, the organization is lackadazical about recruiting them. And, without organization support, some city jobs, and public housing, and many private-sector jobs are hard to come by. Therefore, even the most assimilation-minded Indians are at a distinct disadvantage in the Chicago employment scene. In Chicago parlance, they do not have "clout." The logical source for Indian patronage, of course, is the large Chicago BIA operation. But, despite the sit-ins of the late sixties, this has not turned into a major job source for the Native American

community in Chicago.[16] In any event, the Indian settlement is too large for BIA patronage to make much real difference. But without political friends, those Native Americans who are at the bottom of the skills ladder find the going rough in Chicago's highly politicized market for unskilled labor.

As a result of both politics, longevity in Chicago, and the state of the national economy, there is an economic differential between the black and the red in Chicago. While the city's black community contains vast sections of unemployed and underemployed people, as of the 1970 census the median income for black families in Chicago was about $7,800.[17] While many such families reached that figure only when several members of a household worked, many other families had attained one-wage-earner middle class status. Some, indeed, had managed to become quite wealthy. Thus the range of black housing and neighborhoods in Chicago is enormous, covering the whole spectrum from sedate old wealth, through the gaucheries of the noveaux-riches, to the sordid atmosphere of a West Madison Street shooting gallery. The Native Americans of Chicago are not all clients of St. Augustine's Center, but the city's Indian Centers serve well over 1,000 clients, a hefty percentage of the total population.[18] It seems apparent that most Chicago Indians fare worse than do most Chicago blacks. And there is little evidence to suggest that hiring and job conditions for the Native American have moved beyond primitive and overt discrimination.

The Indians of Chicago are generally perceived of as an economically depressed population, and for most of them this is true. Yet explanations of their status verge on the romantic, and often ignore the real similarities between the Indian experience and the urbanization of other minority groups. Actually, three major forces influence Indian newcomers to Chicago: Indian cultural heritage, low correlation between their skills and the demands of an urban-industrial society, and the fact that they are urbanizing at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. The three often act in concert, and rarely is one force predominant. But we should be wary of explanations in terms of Indian culture, for while the Native American's

heritage gives his experience its special flavor, that experience is often determined by the other major forces acting upon him, forces which are not specific to the Indian population.

Two examples should suffice to make this point. The first has to do with the problem of speaking about Indians or Native Americans at all, when in Chicago we are actually dealing with members of at least 60 separate tribes.[19] The differences in heritage between these tribes are of course often great, and the difficulties in formulation of a "Pan-Indian" viewpoint are enormous. This is often seen as either a hindrance to Indian unity or a monument to the strength of Indian culture: in either case, it is seen as different from the experience of other depressed groups, such as the blacks.

Yet such divisions have been the common experience of other urbanizing groups. Many late nineteenth century "Americans" fretted about the "Italians," who seemed to make a mess of every neighborhood they lived in. Yet closer observers, such as Jane Addams, noted that there were not just "Italians," but actually "Neapolitans, Sicilians, and Calbrians, with an occasional Lombard or Venetian" in the population of the "Little Italy" near Hull House.[20] These differences may seem laughable today, but students of Chicago's Italian community find that fresh immigrants identified with their province, not with the newly united nation of Italy. Whole tenement houses were taken over by <u>contadini</u> from a single province, and "Italians" from other provinces were systematically excluded. Only the outside world identified the entire group at "Italians."[21]

The Italians were not unique in this: other European ethnic groups were deeply divided on coming to the American city. And recent research is breaking down the myth of homogeneous black immigration. Such cohesion as these earlier immigrants achieved came from two sources: the insistance of Anglo-Americans on identifying them as a single group, and the political benefits many of them found in group identification.[22] These same issues now confront the newly urbanized members of Chicago's Indian tribes, and energize both the "Pan" movements and the

resistance to them. Here the native American experience is the Indian variant on a common theme in urbanization in American life.

The second example of similarity between Native American and Euro-American acculturation deals with the enormous literature attempting to explain "Indian mobility," or the tendency of the Native American migrant to wander from place to place rather than settling down into a middle-class defined mold. The first observation here is that many Indians do, in fact, settle down. But, for those who do not, what is the significance of their behavior? Some students of Chicago's Indian community have decided that it has something to do with the Native American's culture -- centuries of non-western, pre-industrial norms supposedly making the Indian a difficult subject for urbanization.[23] Native American behavior in this instance again repeats the experience of many newly urbanized groups. Although they are beginning to settle down as a group, black Americans were for most of the twentieth century known for their migratory ways. In some strata of Chicago's black population, semi-annual trips southward to visit rural relatives are still commonplace. The family does not actually have one address; it divides the year between an urban home and a rural one. The Native Americans' neighbors in Chicago's Uptown area, the impoverished whites from Appalachia, often follow similar migration patters. And the phenomenon is not new. In the Boston of the 1830-50 period, the Irish moved around quite abit: in fact, the general mobility during the ante-bellum years was so great that only 40% of Boston's population seems to have remained in the city for as long as a decade! The figures for the Irish would be higher.[24] Obviously, the "wanderlust" so romantically associated with many Indians bears a striking resemblance to the experience of many of urban America's (and Chicago's) other economically disadvantaged groups during the early stages of urbanization.

The major difference, of course, is that in the nineteenth century wandering was not necessarily an economic liability. There were unskilled jobs throughout the economy, and in fact, the nation's greatest labor shortage was in the unskilled

ranks. Today, however, unskilled labor is in less demand, the competition is keener, and "mobility" often leads to a continual cycle of unemployment or underemployment. Thus, although Native Americans are displaying a common form of "urbanization behavior," they are doing so in an economy far different from that faced by the nineteenth century newcomers to Chicago.

Concentrating for so long on the similarities experienced by urbanizing generations of Blacks, Europeans, and Native Americans should not obscure the real differences in the acculturation process as it affected each of these groups. The Indians, because of their long heritage of non-western culture, may in fact be facing the toughest challenge of all the American ethnics. For while European peasants and the descendants of Black slaves generally had a values structure consonant with the private-enterprise culture which has dominated the United States since the seventeenth century, the Indians have found few values in American culture which resonate with previously held, traditional cultural sets. Thus, the cultural passage they must survive on coming into the city, the mainstream of American culture, is enormous.

Those who do survive become, in a sense, "150% men," sharing in the general culture while retaining their sense of identity and a strong feeling for "traditional values." Often this is an individual, or family-by-family process, and generally the path of acculturation is easiest for those who come to the city with marketable skills -- in other words, for those who arrive in town already partially acculturated.[25] But the case of one or two groups of Native Americans which have managed to match their traditional skills and values with urban demand holds promise that urbanism and Native Americanism can coexist and even prosper.

The most prominent group of Native Americans to find a niche in the city are the Mohawks who have settled in a little colony in Brooklyn, New York. For over a generation, Mohawk men have come to New York to become high-altitude construction workers. From their settlement in Brooklyn they fan out across the nation, building skyscrapers, dams and bridges. Their work, balancing high above the

cities on slender steel girders or cables, is essential to the American model of urban growth. Within their chosen field they have a reputation for excellence in cities throughout the country. The nature of the work -- seasonal, physical, involving great courage, resonates with the surviving values and life-cycle of traditional Mohawk culture. The difficulty AND danger of the work reinforce the Mohawk's self-concept, and its seasonal nature allows him and his family to spend part of the year -- and especially traditional holiday seasons -- back on the reservation. Thus, many Mohawk have found the near-perfect solution to the dilemma faced by all Native Americans: how to make it in an urban-industrial society. In the city, they are economically competitive, working in useful occupations, and off the job building an ethnic neighborhood which stresses the positive values of Mohawk culture.[26] Even in the bars which they frequent, the personal and decorative style reflects their special origins. Both at home and at work, being Mohawk can be a source of pride, not of shame.

Obviously, not all Native Americans can reach this specific solution. But the Mohawk solution indicates that there are corners in our society which will allow Native Americans to be themselves, and yet not starve for that privilege. In Chicago there is no similar community with a strong economic base and a close relationship with the reservation-culture. The Menomenee can keep up with reservation tradition, and even visit frequently. But their attempts to build an industrial base on the reservation in Wisconsin have been thwarted by social and political forces aimed at shaping developments on the reservation into an individualistic-capitalist mold. And in the city, their economic situation is no different from that of the members of Chicago's other Native American tribes. Thus, the importance of the American Indian Center and St. Augustine's as places where Native Americans can go for either relief or organizational activities.[27] Organizations such as these are the only buffers available to most Native Americans who have to face the pressures of urbanization while perched near the bottom of the skills hierarchy which is the basic fact of modern urban economic life.

Yet the culture-shock faced by urbanizing Native Americans is not without its positive potential, both for them and for the nation. American's foremost urban historian, Sam Bass Warner, Jr., has over the last decade developed a persuasive argument for excessive privatism as the most important source of contemporary urban ills. His hypothesis, which has grown out of his exhaustive studies of urban growth and particularly real estate patterns in several of our largest cities, leads him to a call for "democratic planning" as a potential solution to the crisis of the cities. Yet Warner's solution, focusing as it does on the needs and aspirations of the poorer people in the cities, assumes that the nation is ready to relinquish one of its most cherished shibboleths, the belief that land is a civil liberty rather than a social resource. If any group within the contemporary urban population mix is well-suited to lead the assault on that shibboleth, it may well be the new generation of well-educated, urbanized Native Americans. For only they have the impetus -- the horrid conditions in which most of their people live in the great cities -- and the potential spiritual resources -- a strong tradition which rejects the notion of land (and other productive resources) as private rather than public property. Only the Native Americans can provide leadership to an urban coalition which incorporates a set of cultural values wholly at variance with those prevailing in American society. And, if Warner is right, only a coalition so led can hope to revivify America's urban wilderness.[28]

FOOTNOTES

[1]Chicago Tribune, 26 December 1952.

[2]Chicago Sun Times, 25 January 1953; Chicago Daily News, 7 April 1953.

[3]Chicago Daily News, 10 August 1959.

[4]Ibid., 25 January 1963; Chicago Tribune, 28 January 1969.

[5]Chicago Tribune, 24 March 1970 reports on 23 Indians who began a sit-in at the local BIA offfice on 23 March, demanding improvements in education and housing, and the hiring of Indians "to fill all Bureau jobs." In general, the Chicago sit-in was but one example of a wave of such demonstrations which swept the country at that time. The common thread among the demonstrators, be they in Denver, San Francisco, or Chicago was the BIA's perceived failure to deal adequately with the problems of urban Indians. For the "Little Alcatraz Movement," see Chicago Sun Times, 1 June 1970.

[6]Chicago Tribune, 3 September 1971.

[7]Elaine M. Neils, Reservation to City: Indian Migration and Federal Relocation (Chicago: University of Chicago, Department of Geography, 1971), Research Paper No. 131, p. 1.

[8]Ibid., pp. 1-13, 46-67.

[9]Mark Nagler, Indians in the City: A Study of the Urbanization of Indians in Toronto (Ottawa: Canadian Research Centre for Anthropology, 1970), cites motives ranging from "economic reasons" (p. 10) to having "a blast" (p. 14) as central to the Canadian Indian's urbanization.

[10]Merwyn S. Gabriano, "Life in the City: Chicago," in Jack O. Waddell and O. Michael Watson, eds., The American Indian in Urban Society (Boston: Little Brown, 1971), sets 15,000 as a reasonable population figure (p. 172). Cf. his discussion of problems related to enumerating Native Americans, Ibid., pp. 172-175.

[11]Ibid., p. 173.

[12]U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1970 Census of Population and Housing: Census Tracts, Chicago SMSA (Washington, D.C.: GPO, May 1972), Pt. I, p. 1.

[13]Ibid., p. 1; Information on the formation of Chicago's black communities is readily available in Alan H. Spear, Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), esp. pp. 129-146. Similar information on Harlem is in Gilbert Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

[14]Stephan Thernstrom, Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1964), investigates the lack of mobility in 19th Century America. Dick Netzer, Economics and Urban Problems: Diagnoses and Prescriptions (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 18-20, 47-61 is a handy introduction to contemporary economic rigidity.

[15]This developing phenomenon has been analyzed by Gosnell, Negro Politicians (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), and most entertainingly in Mike Royko's recent (and prejudicial) Boss: Richard J. Daly of Chicago (New York: Dutton, 1971).

[16]Vine Deloria, Jr., "The Urban Scene and the American Indian," in Indian Voices: The First Convocation of American Indian Scholars (San Francisco: The Indian History Press), pp. 341-344.

[17]U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1970 Census of Population and Housing: Census Tracts, Chicago, Ill. SMSA (Washington, D.C.: GPO, May 1972), Pt. I, p. 504. The exact figures are $7,883 for families living in census tracts with 400 or more Negro population; due to Chicago's segregated housing patterns, these statistics are probably as good as any for those blacks who responded to the 1970 census.

[18]Prafulla Neog, Richard Woods, and Arthur Herkins, Chicago Indians: The Effects of Urban Migration (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Training Center for Community Programs, January 1970), discusses its theme totally in relation to the St. Augustine's Center. While this is an inaccurate view of the whole Native American community, it is a full account of the center's activities. Client figures for St. Augustine's appear at the beginning of the statistical appendix. St. Augustine's is not the only center operative in Chicago.

[19]Ibid., p. 6. Gabriano, op. cit., places the number of tribes "between ninety and one hundred. . ." (p. 174).

[20]See Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House (New York: MacMillan, 1928), p. 98.

[21]There are now several immigrant studies which point to the divided nature of what the "Anglo's" called and "ethnic group." See Humbert S. Nelli, The Italians of Chicago (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[22]Moses Rischin, The Promised City: New York's Jew's, 1870-1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) and Arthur Mann, LaGuardia: A Fighter Against His Times, 1882-1933 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1959), are examples of these studies.

[23]Neils, op. cit., pp. 84-85; Alan Sorkin, "Some Aspects of American Indian Migration," in Howard Bahr, Bruce Chadwick, and Robert Day, eds., Native Americans Today: Sociological Perspectives (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) pp. 470-71; Gabriano, op. cit., pp. 179-181.

[24]Todd Githin and Nancy Hollander, Uptown: Poor Whites in Chicago (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Peter R. Knights, The Plain People of Boston (New York: Oxford, 1971), Tables IV9-IV12, or 62-66.

[25]Robert F. Berkhoffer, Jr., "The Political Context of a New Indian History," Pacific Historical Review, 40 (August 1971), p. 382. See also H. W. Martin, "Correlates of Adjustment among American Indians in an Urban Environment," Human Organization 23 (Winter 1964), pp.290-5; R.J. Bigart, "Indian Culture and Industrialization," American Anthropologist, 74 (October 1972), pp.1180-8.

[26]Murray Wax, Indian Americans: Unity and Diversity (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971), pp.168-170.

[27]Gabriano, op. cit., pp. 173-5. Cf. White, John Kennardh, "The American Indian in Chicago: the Hidden People," unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1970.

[28]See Sam Bass Warner, Jr., The Urban Wilderness (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), for his most recent statement of the theme he began developing in Streetcar Suburbs (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), the history of late nineteenth century Boston's growth from a walking city to a metropolis with suburbs, and later elaborated in The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Stages of its Growth (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).